



**Melissa Shiff and Louis Kaplan, Mapping Ararat – AR Walking Tour**  
Grand Island, New York, 2012

# out of site: digital cartographies of memory

Shelley Hornstein

Professor of Architectural History and Visual Culture, York University, Department of Visual Arts and Art History School of Arts, Media, Performance & Design, shelleh@yorku.ca

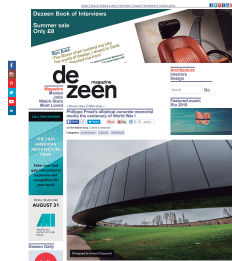
*If Alois Riegl's claim that an architectural monument –in the original and ancient sense of the term– meant creating a work with the objective of safeguarding the memory of an event, then this paper asks if photographs and specifically digital images of monuments and memorials can sustain memory by creating a memorial itinerary, one that links projects virtually and physically to each other beyond geographic sites. While some memorials are successful at stimulating memory recall, others become empty, monolithic objects, even when presented in the form of a museum. In a culture of excess and visual inundation, photography and particularly social media of the newest memorials bid for our emotional commitment, particularly when our own histories and memories are often removed from the one aiming to be recovered, and perpetuate our overfed and undernourished souls. Can the cultural imaginary recuperate the memory that a memorial aims to represent? In looking at a series of recent memorial projects made known through social media, particularly Melissa Shiff and Louis Kaplan's Mapping Ararat, this paper asserts that digital cartographies (that is, images and places) play a crucial role in charting points of memory. The memorial projects discussed here dwell in our virtual, digital and screen-based cultures and imaginaries as complements to the tangible object. Together they explore the cartographic entanglements of geographic and imaginary histories of place as homeland and community in order to suggest that what we choose to remember is set out as part of a selective (both pre- and post-) tour digitized or photographed.*

**keywords** Digital images, Cartography, Photography, Memorials, Architecture, Social media, Geography, Monuments, Memory, Augmented reality



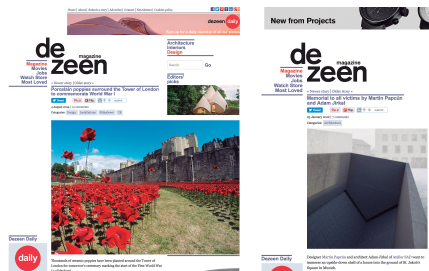
## remembering architecture photographically, digitally

Dezeen Daily, an electronic architectural news digest that broadcasts the timeliest bounty of captivating photographs, delivers its devoted followers what is trending. One dispatch announced the dizzying array of the latest memorials: Philippe Prost's elliptical concrete "Ring of Remembrance", memorial hovering above the military cemetery of Notre Dame de Lorette (**f1**). It commemorates the casualties from WWI, WWII, French-Indochina and French-North African conflicts.



**f1\_Phillipe Prost's elliptical concrete memorial marks the centenary of World War I**  
Dezeen, screenshot of dezeen.com, 2014

Dramatically arresting, these photos compel one to search further. Hence, the second story headlines appearing on the same page reads: "Related Story: Porcelain poppies surround the Tower of London to commemorate World War I" is matched with a dazzling image of a field of porcelain red poppies planted at the base of the Tower of London (**f2**). The narrative infinity of webpages and their photogenic content link to a competition proposal by Pappún and Jirkal of Atelier SAD at St. Jakob's Square in Munich for a Memorial to All Victims (**f3**). Still further along the digital image-wanderings appears an invitational link to the National Holocaust Monument competition, Ottawa, thereby whetting one's appetite to



**f2\_Porcelain poppies surround Tower of London to commemorate World War I**  
Dezeen, screenshot of dezeen.com, 2014.

**f3\_Memorial to all victims by Martin Pappún and Adam Jirkal**  
Dezeen, screenshot of dezeen.com, 2014

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continue the asynchronous and circuitous ordered disorder of social media images where the paradigmatic and syntagmatic directional options are complicated by the way we browse randomly online. We collide and criss-cross image-subjects and the stories they announce.

While this vertiginous shuffling of photographs online gorges the reader with visual information, I argue that the mediatized, digital technologies offer a beneficial metaphoric conjunction, a photographic place digitally mappable, an itinerary of monuments capable of undoing or nourishing our experiential understanding of what a memorial in a physical site *cannot* achieve –necessarily– on its own.

Indeed, we are overwhelmed with advanced technology systems that connect us in an increasingly dense internet-dependent world. What has become known as the “Internet of Things” or *IoT*, has been defined as “a global infrastructure for the information society, enabling advanced services by interconnecting (physical and virtual) things based on existing and evolving interoperable information and communication technologies”<sup>1</sup>. Armed with these pervasive technologies and the knowledge that the internet is no longer an addendum but a central factor in daily life, I want to consider the expansion of a material site in photographic digitization. Rather than see these spaces as separate, I want to signal the itineraries possible across multiple platforms or the conjunction of (rather than between) virtual and material sites.

While some memorials are physically locatable on a geographic site, others are intangible. Is the recalling of past events a function of our transmedial itineraries rather than the responsibility solely of the physical, material memorials as memory-enabling devices? Never before, perhaps, has the power of mediatized images to safeguard memory been made so clear than with the destruction of archeological monuments in Syria, or elsewhere –or what Ömür Harmansah calls performative acts of violence– made known to the world through the global social media sites such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter.

## There are echoes of Palmyra around the world -- is that all that will be left?

THE CONVERSATION

By Simon Mills, The Conversation

Updated 5:01 AM ET, Mon November 9, 2015



Photos: How ISIS ravaged Palmyra's world treasures

**Before:** The ruins of the 2,000-year-old Temple of Baalshamin are seen in Palmyra, Syria, in 2007. The ISIS militant group took over the ancient city last year and razed parts of its [world heritage site](#). Click through to see the landmarks before and after ISIS' occupation.

### Recommended for you



Jet black iPhone 7 is sold out



Heavy smoker John Boehner joins tobacco company's board

f4\_There are echoes of Palmyra around the world - is that all that will be left?

CNN, screenshot of www.cnn.com, 2015

Certainly our emotional and visceral triggers are activated in geographically-anchored and materially-visible and tactile places. Today, while tourist-visits to places are part of the desired embodied experience, their itineraries are often preceded by a preliminary overview as well as a post-visit diet of a textual, visual, or audio itinerary, at least in part experienced through social media. As we increasingly rely on photos in social media, the elision between what is here in actual place and that which is intangible on a screen *stretches* how we experience things in a specific location. In fact, we are already disconnected from the site of where an event took place when a monument is erected on or near it: the recounting of that history in the monument itself actually displaces the location of the event to it, however near or far from the actual site it is.

And yet, this is difficult to accept because however much we live in technologized worlds, architecture still seems to be tied inextricably to the idea of a physical object in a geographic location; a physical object that is at once a thing we take to be permanent and strong through its use of durable materials. This is best articulated with Vitruvius's concept of *Firmitas* —durability or structural soundness. As a result, we tend to imagine architecture as everlasting that will therefore transcend time and eternally convey the story and memory of what took place at that site. To a certain extent this is true. Yet with the proliferation of memorials during this theory-based “memory turn”, and given the increased attention paid to the anxiety that the digital age might run the risk of helping us to forget by rendering obsolete the past without a trace (the malaise of the cultural amnesia, as Huyssen suggests), there seems to have resulted an indulgence in wanting to make the material even more present. Indeed, we have been overfed, I suggest, even gorged, on material memorials in cities internationally, and we have established institutions that dedicate resources and time to intensifying what is believed we need to remember. Inevitably, this leads us to a place of visual desensitization. We know this to be true when we look at monuments from past decades and centuries that no longer emote but rather serve strictly as way-finders in urban space or as sites for a tourist photo opportunity (more recently, the contagion of “selfies” and “selfie sticks” proves this point).

That shift was, in part, addressed by Rosalind Krauss in her groundbreaking work of 1979, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field”, where she examined the state of sculptural works that moved well beyond the traditional concept of “sculpture-in-the-round”. Instead, she noted that these new works moved away from the traditions of sculpture as monument to objects and installations. These radical gestures included elements that had not usually been folded into the canon of sculpture such as “narrow corridors with TV monitors at the ends; large photographs documenting country hikes; mirrors placed at strange angles in ordinary rooms...”<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, Krauss argued that sculpture as a category is indeed a known quantity, even though its elasticized boundaries were more difficult than ever to define. Its definition is perfectly historical and not universal, and moreover its logic, as she put it, “is inseparable from the logic of the monument. By virtue of this logic a sculpture is a commemorative representation. It sits in a particular place and speaks in a symbolical tongue about the meaning or use of that place”<sup>3</sup>. Her piece probed the limits of sculptural form as a positive object in place to arrive at the conclusion that modernist sculpture, the kind that broke the barriers of what we took to be sculpture before, was now neither sculpture proper nor architecture or landscape. “In this sense sculpture had entered the full condition of its inverse logic and had become pure negativity: the combination of exclusions. Sculpture...had ceased being a positivity, and was now the category that resulted from the addition of the *not-landscape* to the *not-architecture*”<sup>4</sup>.

The expanded field of Krauss, while relating to sculpture of decades earlier, conjoins “intertextuality”, a concept introduced by Julia Kristeva. When first introduced in literary criticism, it enjoyed an extended stay but failed to convince the other arts as successfully. Yet here is where it is pertinent to the Internet of Things, digital media and

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physical, cultural and architectural heritage. Kristeva argued that texts run along two axes, both horizontal (connecting author and reader) and vertical (linking a text to another text), and necessarily that a text cannot exist independent of other texts: it is not a closed system. For both Kraus and Kristeva, the expanded field, and intertextuality, are spatial devices that allow objects and ideas to bulge and explode beyond their borders while retaining a relationship to their origins. Indeed, Kristeva references Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the spatialization of language where words intersect or are in dialogue with other words. The concept accounts for the idea of the extra-literary to enhance and relate to the text itself that "is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another"<sup>15</sup>. Each of these terms, as spatializing devices (intertextuality, intermediality or transmediality), position photographed mediatized monuments today.

### mapping ararat: photographic reconfiguration in and out of site

Taken together across the digital and material divide, monuments move beyond the monolithic, and stretch photographically outside the parameters of the physical to welcome the intangible and sentient realms of the possible for touristic itineraries of memorialization. One example that is situated historically, yet revealed poignantly in recent scholarship, is the photographic work by Lucia Moholy (f5).

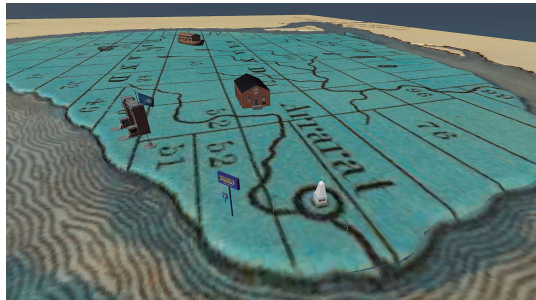


#### f5\_100 years of bauhaus, Photographer, 1923-1928

Lucia Moholy, screenshot [www.bauhaus100.de](http://www.bauhaus100.de), 2016

Her Bauhaus negatives give us a stellar example of how photographs of the Bauhaus were instrumental in constructing its legacy, first because of the 1938 MoMA exhibition: *Bauhaus, 1919-1928* and its catalogue, and later through a broader distribution by Walter Gropius, and Hans Maria Wingler's publication, *The Bauhaus: Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago*, (1962 in German, 1969 in English). These images, originally not attributed to Moholy, eventually secured the iconic status that the Bauhaus now enjoys. "The images served... in shoring up support for modern architecture in the United States in the nascent post-war period..."<sup>16</sup> fact.

A contemporary example that evokes an entirely alternative way of addressing the relay between the material object and its disseminated photographic image can be seen in the project *Mapping Ararat* (f6-f8). It explores the theoretical, virtual and cartographic entanglements of geographic and imaginary histories of place as a performative memorial to homeland and community in order to suggest that what we choose to remember is set out as part of a selective tour digitized and photographically imagined.



f6\_Melissa Shiff and Louis Kaplan, Mapping Ararat  
Virtual Ararat, 2012

This collaborative project by Melissa Shiff and Louis Kaplan, suggests a historical past through photographic images of fictionalized buildings. The project tells the story of Major Mordecai Noah, who, in September 1825, founded Ararat, or what he called a “city of refuge for the Jews” in Grand Island, New York, one of many other proposals for a homeland. An island just outside the city of Buffalo, New York, Grand Island today is a largely residential community that is oblivious to this and its erased Seneca Nation history. Shiff and Kaplan turn to situated photographic technologies (augmented reality that “augments”, or object-images imaged through devices such as iPads, and simulated geo-spatial mapping specifically) as tools for interactively exploring the physical site. Augmentation of the synagogue, cemetery and Mordecai Noah’s gravestone, offer an opportunity for visitors to engage with a fictional, imagined and historically rich past through play, thus providing image-memory-links to yet other places that have disappeared. By deploying these technologies, *Mapping Ararat* invites visitors to plot architecture in the form of “assets” on the geographic site of what became the failed homeland project of *Ararat*, raising questions for participants that complicate and problematize considerations of place and material culture, homelands, geography and ultimately, the notion of the diasporic fixity of identity –as an inscription of place, but also inextricably, of time. Ararat foregrounds narratives that are constructed with navigational digitized heritage images and a mobile device operated by the user-visitor. Along the suggested or randomly devised itineraries, images pop onto the screens bringing about an architectural reconfiguration of the space presented before the visitor’s eyes. Thus, the user-visitor’s performative actions reflect a personal sequencing of the story in piecing these images together. Ultimately, this is a visual story-telling project that can have unlimited numbers of sequencing. The theoretical implications of this visit to the past is to consider the “what if?” question on site, that is, on Grand Island. Precisely, through the act of choosing an augmentations and locating its place within the Grand Island geography through mobile technology, an evocative cultural heritage for a Museum of an imagined homeland can be played out or, at the very least, prodded, suggested, and questioned. If photographing a site “negates the scene it captures and replaces it with an image”<sup>7</sup>, then Shiff and Kaplan attempt to affirm place by inserting an image –however temporarily– into this site. By recalling the history of what the site might have been, and suggesting through augmentations a configuration and reconfiguration of place, this symbolic, ironic and problematic homeland feeds the visitor with a photographic fictional history to learn about a place that has become essentially moribund, if not lost to memory entirely, by challenging our concept of objects and history in the present.

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**f7\_Melissa Shiff and Louis Kaplan, Mapping Ararat – AR Walking Tour**  
Grand Island, New York, 2012



**f8\_Melissa Shiff and Louis Kaplan, Mapping Ararat**  
Golden Shores of Ararat Postcard (circa 1900), 2012

By recalling the history of what the designated sites might have been through photographic images –and therefore memorializing them in the process– the artists suggest through these invented places, augmented objects, and virtual assets, a configuration and reconfiguration of architectural place.

An agent of change through digitized and a virtually invented heritage, this project is an emissary that crawls out of an overfed culture of memorialization known through physical monuments. As such, this project leads the way away from the malaise of physical memorials. It is a sign of hope for memorials, monuments, and photography situated now at the interface of tangible and intangible sites, and where virtual photographic/image invitations are dispatched for conversations hinged on physical or imagined pasts, looking at the future squarely in the face, but rooted, physically all the same, in the space and place of the present.



## endnotes

1. Telecommunication Standardization Sector of ITU, "Overview of the Internet of Things", Global Information Infrastructure, Internet Protocol Aspects, and Next-Generation Networks (The International Telecommunication Union, 2012), 1.
2. Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field", October 8 (Spring 1979): 30.
3. Ibid., 33.
4. Ibid., 36.
5. Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel", in *The Kristeva Reader*, by Julia Kristeva, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 37.
6. Robin Schuldenfrei, "Images in Exile: Lucia Moholy's Bauhaus Negatives and the Construction of the Bauhaus Legacy", *History of Photography* 37, no. 2 (May 2013): 33.
7. Sean Cubitt, "Untimely Ripped (Against the Mass Image)", Keynote Presentation (Transimage Conference, Plymouth, UK, 2016).

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**CV**

**Shelley Hornstein.** Is Professor of Architectural History & Visual Culture at York University, Toronto, Canada. Themes she explores are located at the intersection of memory and place in architectural and urban sites, cosmopolitanism, nationhood and how architectural photography structures a conversation about place, citizenship and human rights. She is currently writing a book entitled: *Site-Seeing: Monumental itineraries and Architectural Tourism*, as an investigation of tangible and intangible place. Hornstein is the recipient of the Walter L. Gordon Fellowship, Canadian and International research awards, and is on the advisory boards for several academic journals. She holds the inaugural eLearning Award for the School of the Arts, Media, Performance and Design, York University, 2014. Her most recent book is *Losing Site: Architecture, Memory and Place*, (Ashgate, 2011). Her other books include *Capital Culture: A Reader on Modernist Legacies, State Institutions, and the Value(s) of Art* (McGill-Queens, 2000), *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust* (Indiana, 2002), and *Impossible Images: Contemporary Art after the Holocaust* (NY, 2003).